

## Mayor's Column for the September 21, 2011 Evansville Review

In my last column I outlined the importance of 'True North' principles and values to authentic leaders as described by author Bill George. This article will discuss Bill George's book, "7 Lessons for Leading in Crisis." George is former Chairman and CEO of Minneapolis-based Medtronic and currently is professor of management practice at Harvard Business School, teaching courses in leadership.

Bill George believes that crises will make or break leaders. Situational pressures and unpredictability will shake out leaders that show wisdom, guidance, courage, conviction, tenacity, and resilience. These are 'real' leadership skills that are very different from business acumen and expertise. He quotes author Jonathon Alter: "Anyone can lead where people want to go. True leaders take them where only their better selves are willing to tread." George states that failed leadership, through denial, rationalization, finger-pointing, and failure to take responsibility, began our current economic/political mess.

George identifies the following seven lessons for crisis leadership and discusses ideas and key points to illustrate and explain them.

1. Face reality, starting with yourself. Ignoring problems makes things worse. Define your responsibility in a crisis. He points out: "Integrity is not the absence of lying. Rather it is telling the whole truth. . . ."
2. Don't be Atlas; get the world off your shoulders. Leadership in difficult times can be a heavy load and can be very lonely. Using candor and honesty, while making you vulnerable, can strengthen your ability to lead by building stronger relationships with others. George points out that failure is normal, and that the question that is relevant is how you respond to failure when it occurs. (I remember Terry Whipple, speaker at the 2008 Evansville Economic Summit, talking about failure as one avenue to fostering innovation.)

Use teamwork to handle crisis. Enlist experts when necessary.

3. Dig deep for the root cause. Moving too fast to find a solution may treat only the symptoms. Probing questions and analysis may take time. Use the military motto of "trust, but verify."

Leaders should maintain credibility while determining causality, using openness and honesty. Finding the true cause can be contentious, messy, and risky.

4. Get ready for the long haul. Do not prematurely declare victory. Fundamental change may be necessary. It is likely there will be a 'new' normal.

Often signals of impending crisis are missed. The situation could get worse; it may be the tip of the iceberg.

In an economic crisis, cash is king. Sufficient cash reserves are paramount. Survivability and fiscal conservatism need to take precedence over short-term financial decisions.

5. Never waste a good crisis. Crisis provides unique opportunity to transform your organization. Tragedy can occur through missing this 'golden' opportunity. Becoming 'lean' can improve competitiveness for organizations and in some cases, allow survivability. Play to organizational strengths and deal with identified weaknesses.
6. You're in the spotlight: follow True North. In crises, people are hungry for information. With modern media, a wealth of information will be available instantly. Do not hunker down; it is ok to say you are sorting through information to find answers as soon as possible.

Organizations and leaders need to be open, transparent, and straight-forward. Internal and external messages need to be clear and consistent. Be a role model for responsibility.

7. Go on offense; focus on winning now. Develop a strategy focused on growing your strengths and put it into action. Make vital investments during downturns.

I read "7 Lessons" during a mini-vacation a few weeks ago and had some time to think about the current national, regional, and local situations in light of George's ideas. I will share some of my thoughts about city government in relation to the Lessons.

As I have said on a number of occasions, I believe your Common Council operates with the best interests of the community in mind. As the economy has deteriorated the past few years, impacts to the City budget have been addressed as they occurred. In fact, for several years we have increased the general fund balance, our cash reserve. Our financial advisors and our auditors both state that we have a healthy fund balance. The city has established policies to guide prudent financial decisions. We must use best practices to best leverage every citizen tax dollar. We will continue to address financial and economic realities head-on.

Likewise, we have worked to streamline our operations and expenses and will continue to do so. City Hall will be implementing a new accounting software program in the next few months that will allow city operations and the water and light utility to use one accounting system for the first time. The utility will begin working towards designation as a RP3 community, a program developed by the American Public Power Association to improve reliability and operations of local departments.

The Police Department is well into the process of obtaining certification. I will be attending a lean government conference in coming weeks to learn of other ways to improve as we adjust to the 'new' normal.

At the recent Committee of the Whole Meeting, the Council voiced continuing commitment to maintaining high quality of service to our residents and keeping focused on the importance of updating and maintenance of public infrastructure as we stretch scarce tax dollars.

The Council special budget meeting will be held on Monday, September 26, at 6:00 p.m. at City Hall. This is a working session to learn the identified needs of departments and committees. As the budget process continues, we anticipate a lean, tight final budget that maintains quality city programs and services.

It is prudent to prepare for the long haul. Focusing long-term allows us to better prioritize and balance a variety of community needs and wants. The Council is committed to continuing their frugal spending and keeping City financial stability strong. These components ensure future financial strength for Evansville. We are in good shape.

#### Community Announcements

It is harvest time—the Evansville Farmer's Market continues through Saturday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, on Church Street next to Creekside Place. If you haven't attended yet, it is a terrific opportunity to "buy fresh, buy local." This year I have enjoyed so many wonderful locally-grown foods: radishes, lettuce, snap peas, corn, green beans, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, ground cherries, tomatoes, onions, peppers, potatoes, and apples. My garden includes annuals and perennials from the Market and I am a weekly buyer of sourdough bread.

On Saturday, October 22, Evansville Farmer's Market will also host an autumn arts and craft fair. For vendor information, call 882-9032 or e-mail [EvansvilleFarmersMarket@gmail.com](mailto:EvansvilleFarmersMarket@gmail.com).

The week of October 3 through 7 is the last curbside pick-up of yard waste for the season. The City waste yard will close for the season in late November.

AWARE in Evansville is collecting children's gently-used outerwear through the month of September for the Koats for Kids project. The need is great this year. Winter coats, snow pants, boots, hats, and mittens for children of all ages are needed. Items can be dropped off at the Care Closet, M & I Bank, Kids Korner, Magic Moments, and Wee Ones.

#### Community Congratulations/Thanks

Scott George has announced his retirement beginning early next year. He has been a city employee for 33 years, the last 12 years as Evansville Water & Light Superintendent.

We appreciate Scott's dedication to his hometown and thank him for his decades of service.

Evansville congratulates and thanks the volunteers receiving Just Desserts awards for their community service. Special congratulations to Dorothy Helgesen for being recognized as a cornerstone of the community.